DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 763 EC 305 431

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TITLE Perceptions of Special Education Teachers in Ohio of the Implementation of Community-Based/Functional Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities.
PUB DATE Apr 97
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (75th, Salt Lake City, UT, April 9-13, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Design; Elementary Secondary Education; *Outcomes of Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; School Community Programs; *Severe Disabilities; Special Education; *Special Education Teachers; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Ohio

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the perceptions of 78 special education teachers in Ohio about the implementation of a community-based, functional curriculum for students with severe disabilities. Teachers responded to a survey on their beliefs, perceptions about educational outcomes, levels of state and local support from educational agencies, how parents and the community felt about the program, barriers to program implementation, and the impact of staff development. Findings indicated that the majority of the teachers valued and supported the use of community based/functional curriculum. They saw the community as playing a key role in the implementation of the curriculum, which leads to outcomes such as a higher likelihood of student employment upon high school graduation, the development of better self-help skills, and an overall higher quality of life. The teachers felt that administrators understood and supported their efforts, but indicated that they are not receiving the necessary resources and funding for the most effective implementation of a functional curriculum. The most overwhelming barrier teachers reported was the inability of general education teachers to accept students with severe disabilities. The widespread existence of two separate systems of education, general and special, was considered to be a major concern. (CR)

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ED 408 760

"Perceptions of Special Education Teachers in Ohio of the Implementation of Community-Based Functional Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities"

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Abstract

Perceptions of Special Education Teachers in Ohio of the Implementation of Community Based / Functional Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of special education teachers in Ohio of the implementation of community based / functional curriculum for students with severe disabilities. A total of 78 teachers representing all 16 regions in which Ohio's Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRC) are located, were selected and provided data for this study.

This study examined several variables which contributed to teacher's perception of the implementation of community based / functional curriculum. The study delineated factors which either contributed or impeded what teachers perceived was successful implementation. This knowledge can assist administrators and others involved in staff development with information needed to inservice other individuals who are currently or will in the future be responsible for teaching students with severe disabilities. This document provides an overview of the body of literature relevant to this study, delineates the methods and procedures for conducting the study, present the findings, and reports the conclusions and provide recommendations. Teachers' perceptions were surveyed and analyzed concerning teacher beliefs and outcomes; levels of state and local support from educational agencies; how parents and the community felt about the program; barriers to program implementation; and the impact of staff development.

Findings indicated that the majority of the teachers valued and supported the use of community based / functional curriculum and felt that administrators understood and supported their efforts. A major barrier in the process indicated a lack of appropriate funding to carry out the day to day activities for students going into the community. A secondary barrier was identified as a lack of acceptance by general educators of students with severe disabilities. The widespread existence of two separate systems of education: general and special, was considered to be a major concern.

Introduction

Since the introduction of (P.L. 94-142), The Handicapped Children's Act in 1975, special focus has been placed on various approaches used to deliver special education instruction for students with severe disabilities. Traditionally, these students with severe mental retardation, as well as other disabling conditions, have been educated in segregated educational facilities. Preservice and inservice has traditionally promoted a curricular approach that consisted of providing students with developmental and sequential tasks, which did not take into account chronological age, self-help skills, or the socialization and leisure competencies needed to function in the mainstream of society. Instruction was limited to the physical space within the school. No instruction took place in the natural environments where the actual skills would be used.

As educators explored other avenues for educating students with severe disabilities, some philosophical changes began to surface. These changes included: (a) abolishing segregated facilities for these children and including them in neighborhood schools where they would be attending if they did not have a disability, (b) creating an age-appropriate functional curriculum that emphasized applied academics, vocational training, recreation and leisure skills, social skills and other skills necessary for adult living, and (c) teaching these skills in the community where the skills would be used and implemented (Brolin, 1995; Goldstein, Sprafken, Freagon, 1983;1980; Inskeep, 1976; Wehman, Renzaglia, & Bates, 1985)

Ohio's educational system is one of the few in the United States where two separate educational programs are publicly funded for the education of students with disabilities. The largest and most comprehensive program is dedicated to the education of the general education students and students with high incidence disabilities such as students with learning disabilities,students with mild retardation / impairment and students who are developmentally delayed. The second and much smaller "center-based" educational program has separate funding through Boards of Mental Retardation, is funded by local taxation and has responsibility for educating students with severe disabilities such as students with significant retardation, multi-disabled and physically disabled. A system of institutional "workshop" sites where adults can attend throughout their lives and participate in a work-like setting is also the responsibility of this program.

Strong professional and parental criticism, parent intervention and a law suit filed in 1968 against the Ohio's Department of Education, Ronker vs. Ohio, Dept. of Education (1983) challenged the "separate and unequal" educational practices and, as part of the settlement, public schools were forced to accept children in the public schools regardless of the severity of the disability. There was much resentment and skepticism from the teaching staff, parents, the community and public school administrators. There was little sensitivity to the needs of children with disabilities and less understanding of what useful skills the students could possibly gain from being part of the general educational system. Failure was predicted even though the students were initially only placed in self-contained classrooms within their neighborhood schools.

Once classroom space was arranged for and special education teachers hired to work in the public school setting, the remaining and most important task became the selection and creation of curriculum that would be most effective in providing outcomes that would lead to the highest level of independence for each individual. It was also important that students with severe disabilities "blend" into the general education environment with the least amount of disruption to the existing program. A community-based/ functional curriculum was selected because of its focus on preparing students with life skills that could be readily applied to everyday living. Another principle on which this curriculum was based was that it promoted the teaching of authentic skills which could be used and taught in real community environments leading to the

highest degree of self-sufficiency and independence for each individual, regardless of the severity of their disability (Falvey, 1989).

As part of restructuring the delivery of services, it was necessary to change from a curriculum composed primarily of cognitive academic skills, to teaching real-life, outcome-based skills. Re-training and staff development programs were created and made available to teachers throughout Ohio to provide them and other staff the necessary tools to implement the community-based / functional curriculum. Although large sums of money and state resources were devoted to this effort, little is known about the effectiveness of the program from teachers' perspectives or the effect of staff development in the implementation of this approach throughout the state of Ohio.

The Problem

The need for relevant curriculum designed to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities is paramount to educators working with this population. It is of greatest importance to have teaching practitioners who are knowledgeable, appropriately trained, and have the skills necessary to develop and implement curriculum across various educational levels and settings which may vary according to their particular school site.

Ohio, through its network of sixteen (16) Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRC'S) was instrumental in the delivery of inservice training to teachers who, in 1986, had little or no experience teaching with a community based / functional curriculum (CB/FC). Training took place across the state in rural, urban, and suburban settings, but no formal studies were ever conducted to determine how the teachers felt about the changes and new approaches for teaching these students. There was a need to conduct a state wide follow-up study to determine teacher's perceptions of the implementation process in the areas of (a) beliefs and outcomes of the program, (b) state and local support systems, (c) barriers to implementation, (d) community and parental support, and (e) effects of staff development.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to gather teachers' perceptions of the implementation process of community based / functional curriculum in classrooms for students with severe disabilities in Ohio's public schools. The Department of Education Division of Special Education in Ohio had invested large portions of their staff development budget to train teachers in this curricular approach, but had never conducted a follow-up study to determine the effectiveness of the community based / functional approach on students with severe disabilities. This study was designed to solicit information from teachers who have had the responsibility for the implementation yet had never been asked about their perceptions of the implementation process. It was the intent of this study to provide valuable information for local educational agencies (LEA), the state education agency (SEA), curriculum experts, universities with teacher training components and others interested in implementation of Community Based / Functional Curriculum in the state of Ohio. The study yielded information which would be useful in building teacher training and retraining models, effective systems change practices within public schools in similar states, factors that negatively impacted on the implementation of the curriculum, and community and parental response to the implementation of the curriculum.

Questions

In trying to ascertain the perceptions of these practicing teachers, this study answered the following research questions:

Question 1.

In the teachers' views what are the benefits/outcomes of using community-based functional curriculum with individuals with severe disabilities?

Question 2.

In teachers' views, what are the administrative support structures needed to implement a successful community-based functional curriculum?

Question 3.

In teacher's views, what are the barriers to the implementation of a community-based functional curriculum?

Question 4.

In teachers' views, how do parents and the community view the implementation of a community based / functional curriculum?

Question 5.

In teachers' views, has staff development / inservice contributed to their knowledge base and ability to implement a community based / functional curriculum?

Methodology

Methods and Procedures

The methods employed to conduct this research included the following:

A. A review of the literature was completed, including the following areas: (1) the history and legislation affecting the education of students with severe disabilities, (2) transition from school to work, (3) functional curriculum development process, (4) community based instruction, (5) inclusive practices for students with severe disabilities, and (6) professional development.

B. A survey of one hundred and twenty-eight teachers was conducted to ascertain their perceptions of the implementation of the community- based / functional curriculum in Ohio. Seventy-eight teachers returned the completed survey questionnaire.

C. After the survey was completed, an analysis of the results was conducted to reveal the perceptions of the seventy-eight teachers regarding: (1) beliefs and outcomes, (2) teacher's perceptions of community and parental perception, (3) barriers to implementation, (4) state or local education agency (LEA) support, and (5) staff (professional) development.

Population

The target population for the study consisted of 128 teachers of students with severe disabilities recognized for having been involved in the process of restructuring the curriculum for their students. These were teachers who had shown an interest in the educational reform process for students with severe disabilities and were concerned about the outcomes of the education of their students. The teachers were personally recommended for this study by staff in their corresponding Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRC) and were selected, in part, by their participation in staff development activities, use of resources from the materials resource center, and specific knowledge about their individual programs from Resource Center staff which had provided technical assistance and monitoring for their program. Teachers were currently working with this population and were using a community based / functional curriculum. The goal was to have 75 teachers respond affirmatively to participate in the study. Seventy-eight responded affirmatively to the letter of invitation, therefore, the decision was made that the study would consist of 78 participants rather than 75.

Identification and Selection Process

It was the intent of the selection process to identify those individuals who would constitute the pool of participants for the survey. The following criteria was used to identify and select the study participants:

1. Teachers who were currently using some level of community-based / functional curriculum;
2. Teachers who were recommended by their SERRC's (Special Education Regional Resource Center) for their professional relationships and involvement in the curriculum restructuring process;
3. Teachers who had demonstrated an active interest in developing, refining and implementing community-based / functional curriculum by attending SERRC sponsored meetings, workshops and other training activities.

Each of the IRC coordinators agreed to accept the responsibility to select, invite to participate, and mail out the survey to each teacher. The mailing included a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope and a letter to the teacher with a three week deadline for it's return.

The criteria for selecting the eight teachers for each SERRC region was:

1. teachers who are currently teaching students with severe disabilities;
2. teachers from at least 3 different school districts in their region;
3. at least one teacher from each level (elementary, junior high, and high);
4. teachers who had attended some form of teacher training in community-based / functional curriculum sponsored by their SERRC or in their school district;
5. at least one teacher from a rural, urban, and suburban setting.

A population of 128 teachers were invited to participate in the survey. Of those 128 participants, 78 returned the survey instruments for a response rate of 61 percent.

Instrumentation

A mail survey was designed to collect the data on the essential questions of this study. A search for similar survey instruments did not yield a valid instrument which could be used or could be modified to meet the needs of this study. Therefore, a survey was developed that was practical, yet comprehensive and could be administered in a short amount of time (20-30 minutes). The survey instrument consisted of 6 parts, one part for collecting demographic data

and the remaining five parts dedicated to the areas of beliefs and outcomes, state or local education agency (LEA) support, barriers to implementation, teachers perception of community and parental perceptions, and staff development / inservice. The questionnaire consists of 49 forced-choice questions on a Likert Intensity Scale to measure the strength of theperceptions. Questions were sequentially grouped with additional space left at the bottom of each page for open-ended responses. At each stage of the survey development, evaluation of question clarity and meaningfulness of survey content was sought from professionals in the field of special education and statistical research.

Pilot Test:

A pilot test was conducted using eight participants who had expert knowledge in the field. The participants included: (a) Ohio's director for programs for students with severe disabilities, (b) two training coordinators who were responsible for much of the initial training on community-based / functional curriculum in Ohio, (c) four master's level teachers each with a minimum of ten years of teaching students with severe disabilities, and (d) a nationally known university professor and lecturer in the area of functional curriculum. Additional input was solicited from faculty at The George Washington University and senior doctoral students in the Doctoral Leadership Training Program. Feedback from the pilot surveys and follow-up interviews were used to clarify wording, order of questions, additions or deletions of questions and overall visual effect.

Data Collection Procedures

Surveys were sent in groups of eight packets to each of the IRC coordinators who had previously agreed to distribute the surveys in their own regions in Ohio. This approach was used in order to assure that all regions in Ohio would be represented in the survey results. A cover letter to the coordinators explained the purposes of the survey and the dissemination process. Each coordinator agreed to send a letter along with the survey packet to each of the participants to insure a better response rate. Each survey packet included a cover letter to the teacher, the questionnaire, and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Mailing the Survey and Timelines:

Mailing the survey to the IRC coordinators occurred on January 15,1995. This provided two weeks to get the surveys to the respondents. Many were hand-delivered or sent by mail. A three week period was established for the return of the survey instrument. The return date for the survey was February 28, 1995. The mailing of a follow-up second survey was not necessary since more than the 75 teachers responded promptly and this met the previously decided goal for the survey return.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the returned surveys was coded numerically into the computer system at The George Washington University. The latest version of SYSTAT (1995) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics including the mean and standard deviations of responses for every item of the survey was employed to answer research questions formulated for the study. A table was generated for each of the five areas of the survey and then each question was analyzed for content and relationship to the research questions.

Response Rates

One hundred and twenty-eight teachers of students with severe disabilities were asked to participate in the study. Their participation was voluntary and anonymity was insured for all who responded. The number of respondents to the questionnaire was 78, a 61% rate of return. All 78 questionnaires were completely filled out and used for the final analysis. The teaching levels among the respondents was closely distributed between elementary, junior high, and high school. There was also an even distribution between urban, rural, and suburban districts represented in the study. Approximately 75% of the respondents had a master's degree or beyond, the others had a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Only 7 teachers had less than 3 years of experience while over half the teachers had been teaching for over 10 years. Over two thirds of the teachers had been teaching special education for more than 10 years and only 8 had been teaching for less than 3 years.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

The five research questions in this study were addressed in this section with supporting information from the questionnaire. The results of each research question is presented in a table form as well as a descriptive narrative. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed (1), agreed (2), neither agreed nor disagreed (3), disagreed (4), or strongly disagreed (5) with each of the questions or statements. A section at the bottom of each section of the survey provided space for comments and further elaboration of a specific item in the questionnaire.

Research Question 1:
In the teachers views what are the benefits/outcomes of using community based / functional curriculum with severely disabled populations?

The most significant item in this section of the survey was question #1 (table 2). Participants had a strong reaction to this negative item which shows that teacher's do not perceive that the basic philosophy of community based / functional curriculum is to water down academic curriculum. In response to question #6, in contrast, respondents perceive that community based / functional curriculum is more beneficial than traditional academic curriculum for students with severe disabilities. One teacher in support of CB/FC commented positively on the questionnaire by stating " I believe this approach greatly strengthens self-esteem and helps disabled students believe in their own abilities. It also teaches the general public (who observes them) that people with disabilities are capable of being contributing members of society".

Concern still remain (question 3) in teachers perceptions as to whether students can actually acquire more skills using CB / FC than when using a more traditional academic, cognitively based curriculum. Another teacher stated " A combination of academic instruction and community based instruction is crucial to the success of students with disabilities".

In question #2 respondents neither agree nor disagree that students with severe disabilities are better able to adapt to the general education setting. In question #11 respondents strongly agree in their perception that the benefit of CB / FC is to make curriculum more relevant to students. They also believe that they are better able to learn self-help skills(question #9), are more likely to be employed after high school graduation (question #8), and are more likely to have a higher quality of life (question #7).

In questions #5 and #4 respondents agree in their perception that students can acquire more social skills using CB / FC and that students can achieve a higher quality of life as a result .

The most significant response to question #1 gives clear indication that teachers do not

believe that CB / FC is a watered down curriculum. A basic and direct teacher comment on the questionnaire best describes this finding in the simplest way; "Lacking CB/FC is like a pair of jeans lacking pockets. Where is the wallet, gum, mints, and change going to go?".

Table 2.1 Beliefs / Outcomes (N = 78)

Survey Questions	
1.	The philosphy of CB/FC is to make curriculum more relevant to students with severe disabilities.
2.	It is important to the success of CB/FC to use the community as part of the classroom.
3.	I believe that students develop better self-help skills when taught with a CB/FC
4.	Students that have been instructed with CB/FC are more likely to be employed upon graduation.
5.	Students that have been instructed with CB/FC are more likely to be employed upon graduation.
6.	CB/FC is more beneficial than traditional academic curriculum for students with severe disabilities.
7.	Students who are taught with a CB/FC approach are better prepared for achieving their own highest degree of independence after leaving school.
8.	Students with severe disabilities are better able to use social skills when taught with a CB/FC..
9.	Students can acquire more skills using CB/FC than when using a more traditional academic cognitive based curriculum.
10.	As the result of using CB/FC, students with severe disabilities are better able to adapt to the "general" education setting.
11.	The basic philosophy of CB/FC is to water down academic curriculum.

Table 2.2 Beliefs / Outcomes (General Comments)

1. I believe skills in natural settings is most beneficial for these students.
2. Districts must make CB/FC a funded curriculum with frequent or everyday access to the community.
3. I have seen tremendous accomplishments with CB/FC form my students. I believe this approach greatly strengthens self-esteem and helps disabled students in their own abilities. It also teahces the general public (who observes them) that people with disabilities are capable of being contributing members of society.
4. A combination of academic instruction and community based instruction is crucial to the success of students with disabilities.
5. I strongly believe in a CB/FC approach but feel administration needs to be eudcated on the strenghts of CB/FC and should be willing to allow the community to be the classroom.
6. I taught in an MR-DD setting for 17 years. We had a strong community based program which was extremely beneficial to students of elementary-senior high age.
7. I take a trip to the mall weekly. It has been great to teach CB/FC.
8. Lacking CB/FC is like a pair of jeans lacking pockets. Where is the wallet, gum, mints and change going to go?

Research Question 2:
In teachers views, what are the administrative support structures needed to implement a successful community based / functional program?

The most significant finding in this section is question #1 shows that teachers varied widely in their responses to their perceptions that community based / functional curriculum is to water down academic curriculum. Although the majority of teachers disagree that CB/FC is a watered down curriculum there are still some teachers who may have concerns and agreed with this questionnaire item. An example was a comment on the survey where a teacher said " I have often felt like a "salmon swimming upstream" because so many of my colleagues use watered down curriculum"). A possible problem with this question may have been that the term "watered down" curriculum was not defined and may have had a different meaning to the various teachers taking the survey. In contrast, respondents answered with strong agreement to question #11 which asked if the philosophy of CB/FC was to make curriculum more relevant to students with severe disabilities. Another teacher stated " Lacking CB/FC is like a pair of jeans lacking pockets. Where is the wallet, gum, mints and change going to go?"

A significant finding which directly supports the premise of this study (question #10) is that teachers perceive that it is important to the success of CB/FC to use the community as part of the classroom. In the comments section teachers report that they are not always supported in these efforts. One teacher said "If the Ohio Department of Education encourages CB (Community Based Instruction), then funds are needed for individual school systems to provide transportation (i.e. school vans) of students to community based educational sites. Teachers and aides should not be expected to provide the use of their own perscnal vehicles". Another teacher felt supported and stated " I am not in walking distance of town, but my administration supports using busing even though it is expensive". It appears that there are various levels of support provided by different administrators when it comes to providing the necessary resources to implement CB/FC and that the success of the program implementation may be linked to the administrative supports.

Respondents strongly agree in their perception that CB / FC is highly regarded by educators, feel encouraged and supported in using this approach by their special education supervisor, believe that student's individualized educational plans (IEP'S) reflect CB / FC in their content.

In question #7 respondent's agree in their perception that the administration comments positively on the importance of CB / FC but participants believe that they do not receive enough financial resources to fully implement the program. From comments on the survey and other information from the survey it appears that in some school districts additional resources are needed for full and successful implementation.

Table 3.1 State or LEA (Local Education Agency) Support (N = 78)

Survey Questions	
1.	CB/FC is an educational practice that is highly regarded by educators for students with severe disabilities.
2.	I am encouraged to utilize CB/FC by my special education supervisor.
3.	The Ohio Department of Education supports the philosphy of CB/FC.
4.	I am encouraged to utilize CB/FC by my special education supervisor.
5.	I do not receive enough community support.
6.	The administration comments on the importance of CB/FC.
7.	I need additional resources to fully implement CB/FC.
8.	My school district consistently/routinely discusses the importance of CB/FC in professional meetings, i.e. faculty meetings, IEP meetings, etc.
9.	I receive sufficient budget/funds to support CB/FC material development for my classroom.
10.	The Ohio Department of Special Education encourages CB/FC through its monitoring of special education programs.

Table 3.2 State of LEA (Local Education Agency Support) (General Comments)

1.	All resources are generated by the class, which makes and sells lunches to the staff. We receive no encouragement/support form our school adminstrator of LDC.
2.	I have been using CB/FC for 15 years because I believe it was the most beneficial approach toward independence. I have often felt like a "salmon swimming upstream" because so many of my colleagues used watered down curricula. Unfortunately my focus has been FC with small amounts of community work because of financial restrictions. My immediate supervisor and building administrators have been supportive. My students work without pay in our school. We service the vending machines, coffee for faculty, some custorial services and work for the cafeteria staff. We also do some limited "outside" work for Tupperware and Avon distributors.
3.	There seems to be a lot of controversy over IEP development, and I feel that those students requiring/needing CB/FC are left out when realistically writing IEP's as a whole. Additional resources are need to implement a natural a natural setting group in a community versus taking a whole classroom, needed to make the smaller cluster groups.
4.	Not all IEP's written reflect CB/FC. This is not one of the weak areas. We have developed our own curriculum which makes it easy to write goals and objectives directly related to CB.FC.
5.	Inclusion seems to the rage. I feel that many teachers are overlooking CB/FC for an inclusion model.
6.	For three years, $25.00 for materials has been made available to me.
7.	I am the only teacher of M.H. children in my school district. Staff and administration supports my class but it is me who promotes them on a daily basis.

8.	I speak for the IEP's that I write that do not reflect CB/FC and our curriculum. Other IEP's that we have received from other districts do not always do the same.
9.	No CB/FC activities occur at my present employment for my grade level. Funding is ver limited for this type of activity.
10.	Although we always want more resources, I would find/adapt/borrow whatever I needed to implement CB/FC if I felt is was the best option for my students. Many times an"out" used by my colleagues to not implement a program is to say they don't have adequate planning time or proper materials.
11.	Lip-service is given, but not backed-up by resources or FUNDS. I pay for a lot of activities out of my own money.
12.	If the Ohio Department of Education encourages CB, then funds are needed for individual school systems to provide transportation (i.e. school vans) of students to community based educational sites. Teachers and aides should not be expected to provide use of their personal vehicles.
13.	I am not in walking distance of town, but my administration supporting using bussing even though it is expensive.
14.	The State Department needs to evaulate the segregated facilities tof the Multi Handicapped (MH) and preschool units. The administration is from the old thought school of "out of sight, out of mind". The building is an Administration non-handicap accessible building and are restricted to the building except when working with the SLP 3 times a month.

Research Question 3
In teachers views, what are the barriers to the implementation of a community based / functional curriculum?

Scores on this section of the survey exhibit considerable variation and comments on the survey support teachers perceptions of the barriers faced in the process of implementing community based / functional curriculum. The majority of the survey responses fall within the "neither agree nor disagree" range on the Likert scale.

The most significant barrier and considerable response for respondents was question #10. Teachers disagree in the perception that general education teachers are accepting of students with severe disabilities. Although at the time of this survey, the majority of students with low incidence disabilities were in self-contained classrooms and students only integrated in classes such as physical education, art, and lunch periods, it is the respondents perception that students with severe disabilities were not welcomed or are accepted by general educators. This is supported by the comments section of the survey. A teacher comment stated " General education teachers "accept" students with disabilities as long as they are not in the regular classroom setting. Once the students are in the general classroom, the acceptance level varies based on the teacher, the principal, the supervisor, and the administration's attitude". Another teacher commented " Students are looked upon as needing pity" and another said " There still remains a wall between general education and special education. I feel general educators believe it is not within their professional duties to teach a "labeled" student. Attitudes between general education and special education must change so we can start working as a team on goals for students".

There was also a significant variation in question #3, which asked teachers if the school district arranged for additional personnel (i.e., parents, therapist, volunteers) to assist with activities taking place in the community. Although there may be evidence on the part of administrators of intent to support the program, in many of the sites, according to teachers comments, the additional personnel was not available to provide adequate adult coverage for the students in community environments.

Although in parts of the survey there is evidence that in teacher's perception there is some level of support from the administration and community, it does not eliminate what teachers describe as barriers to the implementation of the program. Some of these barriers are providing consistent transportation for students to community environments, providing basic supplies unique to the implementation of the curriculum, or teachers' perception that the students are not always accepted by the community. Some examples of relevant teacher comments were " Our school district only provides one van which is shared among 32 classes. Scheduling its use is very difficult", "My school district does not provide any direct help. My resources are my local IRC" (Instructional Resource Center), and "School district acknowledges the importance of CB / FC as long as the teacher spends countless hours planning, getting own support and resources".

In question #6, respondents perceptions are in the neither agree nor disagree range in whether parents of students with severe disabilities clearly understand CB / FC. A teacher commented " Parents still perceive academic areas as the only worthwhile topics of instruction". Other teacher comments to substantiate this question were not available. Question #8 suggests that there may be a lack of local available natural environments (i.e., domestic sites, local places of business, etc.) to implement CB / FC without the use of some mode of transportation..

Table 4.1 Barriers (N = 78)

Survey Questions	
1.	Parents lack understanding of CB/FC.
2.	The school district provides supervision by an administrator skilled in CB/FC.
3.	The school district provides transportation for students to community environments.
4.	I believe that students with severe disabilities are not accepted by the community.
5.	Legal requirements (i.e. transportation liability) hinder the development and implementation of CB.FC.
6.	The school district provides resources for the implementation of the CB/FC (i.e. funds, bus tokens, consumables, etc.)
7.	There is a lack of available natural environments in my area (i.e domestic sites, local places of business, etc.) to implement a CB/FC.
8.	The school district acknoweldges the importance of CB/FC by providing verbal encouragement and support in carrying out CB/FC activities.
9.	The school district arranges for additional personnel (i.e. parents, therapists, volunteers) to assist with activities taking place in the community.
10.	General education teachers are accepting of students with severe disabilities.

Table 4.2 Barriers (general Comments)

1. My school District does not provide any direct help. My resources are our local IRC.
2. My greatest concern is related to the current trend of inclusion which I believe is the complete opposite of CB/FC. I believe in giving kids instruction that leads to independence, not watered down curriculum. I am concerned that "inclusion" may eliminate CB/FC for severely disabled students.
3. School district acknowledges the importance of CB/FC as long as the teacher spends countless hours planning, getting own support and resources.
4. We have many inclusive opportunities within the regular education classrooms and extra curricular activities.
5. A previous superintendent arranged for a bus trip every two weeks, but felt that since we were "self-supporting" nothing else was needed.
6. Money is received for city transportation use. We strive to inform our parents of our goals.
7. I use my own vehicle to transport students into the community. I am covered under school liability. Our local board of MR/DD provides us with a van for out of town field trips free of charge. We are very well accepted by the community and school staff. Our school district provides no extra money for this.
8. Parents still perceive academic areas as the only worthwhile topics of instruction.
9. At our level (elementary) CB/FC is not acknowledged, a limited program is provided in the high school age. Students with severe disabilities are received well in our community. (My precious CB/FC program proved this) A few teachers are accepting of my multi-handicapped students, many are not. It is a new situation for them. Hopefully this will change as we do gradual partial inclusion and provide positive experiences for everyone.
10. General education teacher "accept" students with disabilities as long as they are not in the regular classroom setting. Once the students are in general education classrooms, the acceptance level varies based on the teacher, the principal, the supervisor and the administration's attitude.
11. In reference to general education teachers as being accepting of students with severe disabilities, they are accepting as long as they do not have to deal with them directly. Much of the teaching in all areas still falls on the shoulders of the special educator (i.e. discipline, P.E., etc.).
12. Students are looked upon as needing pity.
13. Our school district provides only one van which is shared among 32 classes. Scheduling its use is very difficult.
14. There still remains a wall between general education and special education. I feel general educators believe it is not within their professional duties to teach a "labeled" student. Attitudes between general education and special education must change so we can start working as a team on goals for students.
15. We are always advocating with regular education in mainstream experiences. My MH kids do best in hands-on classes. We are growing with every trip in town. I am fortunate to be located right on Court St. (Main drag) in Athens, just open the door and you are in it.
16. Teacher drives a school van.

Research Question 4:
In teachers views, how do parents and the community view the implementation of a community based / functional curriculum?

While there are significant variations in the majority of questions in this section of the survey, the most considerable variation was found in questions #3 and #8. In question #3, teachers feel that the community has not been supportive in their efforts to secure jobs for their students. Although the mean score falls within the "disagree" range, the standard deviation reflects information that infers that there are some teachers who may be experiencing some levels of success in procuring employment for their students.

In question #8, scores reflect a wide variation in teachers in their perception of whether training seminars have been made available to parents of students with severe disabilities. A teacher stated in the comments section of the survey " Very few training seminars, maybe two or three have been made available to parents in the past five years". Another teacher commented "Any parent training has been done by individual teachers and therapists. Most parents see the benefits for their children after they have been involved with the program (table 5.2)

The responses to questions #1, #2, and #4, show that teachers neither agreed or disagreed in the perception of the levels of support from the community as determined from the mean score. This included acceptance and assistance with the use of community as training sites for the students (i.e., local places of business, recreation and leisure environments, etc.), direct assistance such as classroom materials or financial help in sponsoring community trips, consumables for in-classroom use, and/or providing appropriate work sites for students. Although there is evidence from teacher's comments on the survey that there has been some publicity in local newspapers or other news sources highlighting the positive aspects of the program, the majority the respondents feel there is a lack of beneficial publicity in the media. Some of the positive comments are " Some newspaper articles have commented favorably on our work with the students", another comment was "We are always in the paper - we do community service volunteer work and utilize the places we all have to go to in later life".

In questions #6 and #7 there are modest variations in the means and standard deviations. Teacher's agree as determined by the mean score in the survey that in their perception parents do report examples of their child's ability to transfer skills learned in the school/community to the home environment and that fathers participate in parent / teacher conferences and IEP meetings.

In question # 5 teacher's perception in this survey question is that parents whose children are enrolled in the program neither agree nor disagree in their satisfaction of the the program. Some examples of parent comments were " Most parents see the benefits for their children after they have been involved with the program", "Our parents were very supportive", and "Parents still perceive academic areas as the only worthwhile topics of instruction".

Table 5.1 Community / Parents (N = 8)

Survey Questions	
1.	Parents report examples of their child's ability to transfer skills learned in school/community to the home environment.
2.	Training seminars have been made available to parents on the topic of CB/FC.
3.	Fathers of children with severe disabilities participate in parent/teacher conferences and Iep meetings.
4.	I have received assistance (i.e. personnel time, materials, financial, other) from community sources.
5.	Parents whose children are enrolled in the program are satisfied with the CB/FC curriculum.
6.	There has been publicity in your local newspapers or other news sources highlighting the positive aspects of CB/FC during the past five years.
7.	Personnel in the business community have been accepting of schools using their facilities as teaching environments for students.
8.	The community has been supportive with the implementation of CB/FC by providing work opportunities for your students.

Table 5.2 Community/Parents (General Comments)

1. Any parent training has been done by individual teachers and therapists. Most parents see the benefits for their children after they have been involved with the program. Small steps towards independence provide a small measure of freedom for caretakers.
2. Being in a small town has been beneficial, the students as well as their parents are known an socialize as a group. It seems everyone in town knows my students because of living in a small town and our community field trips.
3. Out of seven students in my classroom, one student has an adult male living in the house. It is worth noting that this particular male is NOT the student's biological father.
4. My children are young. Community activities include library story hour, grocery shopping (two students and one adult at the time), use of park system, and naturalist lessons, digging mums at a flower farm, picking pumpkins, cutting a Christmas tree at the tree farm, etc. Language and social skills are stressed, along with mobility.Results have included increased community awareness of MH students as local community members and outreach (i.e. library asking school staff to provide in servicing to library staff or better understanding serving MR population, initiated after we became regular story hour participants).
5. We are always in the paper - we do community service volunteer work and utilize the places we all have to go later in life.
6. Some newspaper articles have commented favorably on our work with the students. Very few training seminars , maybe two or three have been made available to parents in the past five years.
7. We have the parents complete home questionnaires to gather functional skill information. The parents are an integral part of the IEP process.
8. Have received assistance from local SERRC in the form of payment for my class catering several SERRC individuals.
9. Most of my answers pertain to my past experience with CB/FC for the MR-DD programs which is located in the same area. Our parents were very supportive. Only three or four fathers attend IEP meetings.

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Research Question 5:
In teachers views, has staff development /inservice contributed to their knowledge base and ability to implement a community based / functional curriculum?

Teachers perception of training on the use of community based / functional curriculum on the college level (question # 8) brought about considerable variation in responses. Although the mean score fell within the "agree" portion of the survey, some respondents may not have received any training in college.

Question #7 also had a high variance in teacher response. It appears that many participants had not received any type of CB / FC staff development at least two times per year as the survey asked. From teacher comments on the survey it is ascertained that much of the staff development that was done was from teachers themselves. Some of these comments were " The training that I have received has been informally modeled by experienced teachers in community based instruction. No one ever said "this is the way to do it...", "Hands on participation provided us with most of our education", "Although formal staff development is important to form a foundation, staff interaction and "on the task" adaptation/training have provided me the most insight", and "We have received no staff development".

Another significant response (question 6) asked teachers if in their perception CB / FC was not the best curricular approach for severely disabled students. The mean response was 3.0, within the neither agree nor disagree level, but somewhat surprising in view of some of the other responses to similar questions in other portions of the survey. Many other comments on the survey reflected that teachers believed that community based functional curriculum was, in fact, the best curricular approach for these students.

In questions #3 and #2 (table 6) respondents agree in their perception that they have been adequately trained in the use of CB /FC and their direct supervisor has provided technical assistance and/or has demonstrated effective techniques for implementing the curriculum. This seems to be contradictory to some of the previous answers in the survey where the teachers felt that they had had few staff development opportunities or that they had supervisory assistance from administrators who were knowledgeable of the implementation of CB / FC. Inservice had not always included the opportunity for visiting other teachers who may have been using a community based / functional curriculum. From some of the teacher's comments, there is evidence that Ohio, through its Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRC) has had some impact in the responsibility for the staff development of teachers. It was also through this regional training system that most of Ohio's Supervisors received instruction which gave them the necessary skills to train teachers in CB / FC.

In question # 1 respondents neither agree nor disagree in their perception of whether opportunities have been provided to visit other classrooms to observe other veteran teachers with skill in CB / FC.. This practice was more prevalent at the initial implementation process when teachers needed the most assistance, skills and techniques which could be immediately implemented in their classroom. One teacher did respond with a positive comment by stating " Opportunities to visit other classrooms using CB / FC are slowly improving after need was expressed".

In question #7 approximately one half of the respondents answered positively to whether staff development in some aspect of CB / FC has been offered at least 2 times each school year during the past five years.

In question # 8 respondents agreed in their perception that they had not had any college pre-service training in the area of CB / FC.

Table 6.1 Staff Development (N = 78)

Survey Questions	
1.	Opportunities have been provided for you to visit other classrooms using CB/FC.
2.	Your direct supervision provides technical assistance and/or demonstrates effective techniques for implementing CB/FC.
3.	I feel I have been adequately trained in CB/FC.
4.	I understand the philosphy behind CB/FC.
5.	I need more training in CB/FC to be comfortable with total implementation.
6.	CB/FC is not the best curricular approach for severely disabled students.
7.	Staff development in some aspects of CB/FC has been offered at least two times each school year during the past five years.
8.	I did not have CB/FC training in my college work in special education.

Table 6.2 Staff Development (General Comments)

1. I would love to see a return to CB/FC and do away with inclusion. It is very difficult to do both.
2. While I understand CB/FC, I am always looking for new ways to implement it in my classroom.
3. Hands on participation provided us with most of our education.
4. The training that I have received has been informally modeled by experienced teachers in community based instruction. No one ever said, "this is on way to do it..." We were told in college, "use the community as your classroom."
5. Although formal staff development is important to form a foundation, staff interaction and "on the task"adaptation/training have provided me the most insight.
6. When I worked for the County Board of MR-DD I felt very supported with resources, funding, and training. The past two years I have worked FOR A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM and there are NO resource (transportation, etc), very limited funds, and little support.
7. We have received no staff development.
8. Opportunities to visit other classrooms using CB/FC are slowly improving after need was expressed.
9. All efforts for staff development to be educated have come from the teachers themselves.

Summary

The findings in this study provide a sampling of data to assess teacher's perceptions of the implementation of community based / functional curriculum in Ohio's schools. Since this study examined factors associated with how teachers saw the current status of the implementation of the curriculum, several conclusions make it noteworthy: (a) teachers have a clear understanding that CB / FC makes curriculum more relevant for students with severe disabilities. They see the use of the community as playing a key role in the implementation of the curriculum leading to outcomes such as a higher likelihood of employment upon high school graduation, the development of better self-help skills, and an overall higher quality of life; (b) teachers believe that CB / FC is an educational practice that is highly regarded by educators. They feel supported by the Ohio Department of Education and encouraged by their local education agency but suggest that they are not receiving sufficient support with resources and funding nesessary for most effective implementation; (c) the most overwhelming barrier teachers report is the inability of general education teachers to accept students with severe disabilities. This is followed by teachers feeling that there is a lack of support in areas such as the school district arranging for additional personnel to assist with activities taking place in the community; and (d) the school district acknowledging the importance of CB / FC by providing verbal encouragement and support.

Implications of the Results

As in other parts of the country, Ohio's students with severe disabilities had been traditionally educated in segregated settings using developmental / vocational approaches. The programs instructed students to perform repetitive tasks mimicking production-style vocational settings. Students had minimal instruction in functional curriculum, life skills or community based learning. Practices that were limiting to the education of students with severe disabilities was also evident throughout the literature. State and local fiscal appropriations in Ohio for supporting and encouraging community based / functional curriculum were sparse, resulting in limited resources, diluted money and personnel, gaps in services, overlap of services, a lack of accountability and meaningful staff development practices (York, Vandercook, Macdonald & Wolf, 1989).

Transition from school to adult life for students with severe disabilities continues to be a national concern for policy makers, educators, adult service providers, and families (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994). However, evidence from this study suggests that emerging transition services coupled with community based / functional curriculum and increased professional development for teachers has been effective in improving student's postschool outcomes and over-all teacher satisfaction with this curricular approach. Over the past ten years, federal legislation has addressed the complexities of providing appropriate secondary and postsecondary educational services to youth. Local educational agencies in Ohio responded by creating school and community based programs which enhance transition and teaching skills in independent living.

Although most of Ohio's educators and many teachers throughout the country have taught traditional / developmental skills in the past, there is evidence from this study and others throughout the country that there has been a reemergence of the functional skills approach for teaching students with severe disabilities (Pumpian et al., 1980; Saylor & Guess, 1983; Wilcox & Bellamy, 1982). The importance of teaching skills that were functional was widely recognized in the literature (Brown, Nietupsky, & Hamre-Nietupsky, 1976; Snell,1983; Wilcox & Bellamy, 1982). Despite general agreement by the participants in the study that functional skills are those contributing directly to the attainment of greater independence, self-sufficiency, and quality of life, there is still some controversy over how to best define, select and analyze those skills. Attempts

to clarify the concept of functional skills in the "comments" areas of the survey used in this study reflect the maturing educational thinking of the teachers.

The opportunity to give students an early and accurate sense of the "real world" has been accomplished through community based instruction. This instruction has been viewed by teachers, not as a field trip, but the optimum environment for students to acquire the skills and for the teacher to verify that the skills have been learned and can be applied. Teachers reported that teaching students in natural learning environments provides opportunities to develop social skills, friendships, and other appropriate behaviors with people without disabilities. This is supported by the literature and other relevant studies dealing with community based instruction (Falvey, 1989; Kennedy, Horner & Newton, 1989; Brown et al.1976; Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupsky,et al.,1979; Falvey, 1989; Snell & Browder, 1987).

There are many factors which influence teachers' perception of community based / functional curriculum. Each of these factors and it's implications is represented by a research question in this study.

Question #1

Philosophically there was agreement with one of the earliest authors in this body of literature who stated that students, regardless of the severity of their disability, should be taught everything they are capable of learning that will assist them to function in life (Inskeep,1926). Ohio's educators have met the challenge by providing a meaningful curriculum in classrooms with students that exhibit a wide range of severe disabilities and achievement levels. Academic programs have been adapted to accommodate the way students learn differently (Wang & Birch, 1984) and have focused on functional activities of daily living and vocational preparation (Bender & Valletuti, 1982; Brolin, 1978; Falvey, 1986; Ohio Department of Education, 1987; West, 1988; Wilcox & Bellamy, 1987).

Initially teachers in the study instructed their students with a curriculum that included academics and / or pre-academics as part of the educational sequence. This sequence was typically based upon a traditional model, in other words, they were based upon those skills and skill sequences to which nondisabled students are exposed as they acquire and develop academic skills. The teaching sequence for the students with severe disabilities was consistent with teaching sequence used for non-disabled students. However, the task analysis of the skill sequence required a more detailed and various adaptations and modifications. Additionally, given the difficulty that these students have in generalizing skills, academic teaching activities and materials had to be functional and chronologically age appropriate. Although much of the literature refers to this curricular approach as functional, for the sake of public relations and acceptance of this program, specifically for parents who felt this term did not have an educational connection, the term applied academics was used to describe the curriculum. The teachers in the study strongly agreed that students needed community-based instruction with frequent opportunities to demonstrate skills in the actual settings where they would be used (i.e., vocational training in real work settings; banking procedures at a real bank). The training lasted long enough for students to sample a variety of skills and learn to interact with their peers in a variety of settings. Social skills development improved as a result of of community based / functional instruction.

Question #2

Respondents viewed support and understanding of the purpose and need for community training from various people as particularly important in the development and maintenance of the community-based educational program. Specifically, support from administrators was critical.

Teachers strongly agreed that community based / functional curriculum was highly regarded by their supervisors and the Ohio Department of Education. Administrators who understood and supported the program, for example, facilitated the implementation, established the logistics, investigated and obtained liability coverage, and identified and secured fiscal support. Concerns over liability was an area often found in the comments section of the survey. The issue of liability, that is, who is responsible for injury or property damage when students are involved in community training is a major challenge in the development and implementation of a community training program. Liability issues in some cases concerned the respondents who felt that school policies lacked clarity and specificity. A problem often mentioned in the surveys dealt with insurance coverage for teachers who chose to drive students in their own automobiles for community instruction. After much deliberation and investigation it was found that in many school districts a teacher who held a chauffeur's license would be covered for all liability under the school's current policy without additional cost to the district. Although it was not the best choice for the teachers, it was the only way many teachers were able to conduct community instruction.

Implementing educational programs within a variety of community environments required the development of student / staff ratios and schedules that varied from those typically used in traditional classroom-based programs. Administrators and teachers had to be creative in utilizing existing staff and volunteers to conduct training in the community. There is indication from the findings in this study that in some school sites this continues to be a problem. Infrequent trips to the community result in artificial environments. Taking large numbers of students with severe disabilities out in the community at once often resulted in overwhelming the business owners.

Question #3

Insufficient funding was the major barrier to the implementation of a community based / functional curriculum. In many instances , funds have not been available to cover expenses for transportation, whether the transportation is provided by public transit, private cars or school vehicles. Funds are not always available to allow participation in a variety of community activities, such as eating at a restaurant, making a purchase at the grocery store, or using a local recreational facility. Teachers felt that in order to provide students with opportunities to learn to respond to natural clues and corrections, to use materials, and to respond appropriately to natural consequences, real money must be used, even during instructional periods. Although this has been a barrier, creative methods and strategies have been developed by the educators for financing community training.

Another barrier appears to be the lack of acceptance by general education teachers of students with severe disabilities. Perhaps the biggest personnel dilemma facing Ohio's schools is the widespread existence of two separate systems of education: typical and special. In the enthusiastic pursuit of developing special services, students were separated with defined disabilities from those who are typical or nondisabled. Natural diversity of school population is drastically limited during school hours based on the belief that students with disabilities cannot learn in general classrooms and particularly that students with more severe disabilities require special classes and centers. With this division has come the separation of educators and administrators into two major groups. Furthermore, in their separate evolution, the basic designs within special education and regular education are often incongruent. There are pronounced differences in terms of curricula, scheduling, teaching methods, and at times even transportation. These differences act as barriers to the unification of educational programs to serve all students. Although there is evidence of inclusive educational practices in parts of the state, this has not become a widespread practice for students with severe disabilities.

Question #4

Teachers believe that the community has been responsive and supportive with the implementation of the curriculum. Personnel in local businesses have been accepting of schools using their facilities as teaching environments for students with severe disabilities. People who work in business and industry have shown a vested interest in their local school system, which produce their labor force. In a time when there is a shortage of individuals willing to accept employment that may be repetitive in nature or less skilled, future employers have seen evidence of the potential for filling these positions with students with severe disabilities. Many students which have been placed in the labor force as part of their school experience have demonstrated capabilities such as the ability to learn and perform vocational skills, get to the job on time, get along with others, and have lower rates of absenteeism than other employees performing the same types of jobs.

Teachers understand that the business community has been a tremendous resource for information about the jobs that may be available for their students. Existing county vocational centers that are in place in all counties in Ohio, which typically offer a standardized vocational curriculum, such as auto mechanics or horticulture, have had many limitations for students with severe disabilities. These centers have not usually responded directly to the unique labor market needs of a given community where a student might be potentially employed. They have also not always been enthusiastic about individualizing instruction or including students who may not be able to totally fulfill their self-imposed certification requirements. A more appropriate and successful approach has been to survey local merchants and other trade groups to determine their future labor needs and begin the transition process as soon as the student has gained sufficient skills to be of service to the employer. Effective transition planning has been a key to successful post-school options for these students.

Support from parents was a critical component in the successful implementation of community based / functional curriculum. Parental support and involvement was necessary for the following reasons: (a) this new program involved parents in the program development phase and in maintenance of the program so that input and understanding was shared from the beginning, (b) parents promoted the growth and success of the program by talking with other parents, administrators, and teachers, and (c) parental input was critical to the child's growth and success in the program. To maximize both the potential of the program and it's direct effect on students, parental input and involvement was necessary. Parents also aided in the implementation by helping to determine the functional skills that needed to be taught, by providing other essential input regarding how and what their son or daughter could learn, or by recruiting additional assistance for community training. It became important for the teachers to facilitate interaction with the family rather than to direct it, so that they developed the concept of "working with" rather than "working for" families. Strategies that were effective to develop the involvement were frequent meetings with the family both at school and at the home, telephone contact with them, and regular notes sent to the home that reflected positive feedback about their son or daughter, as well as occasional suggestions or areas of concern. When families identified concerns and problems, solutions were generated with a sense of shared responsibility between school and home.

Question # 5

Staff development in Ohio is mostly delivered through a state-wide system of Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRC's). Although many of the centers delivered ongoing, methodical training, others did not. This explains the discrepancy on the differing levels

of training in different parts of the state. The SERRC's under the guidance and funding of the State Department of Education receive general suggestions for the delivery of staff development but are autonomous in making final decisions in regarding the frequency and levels of training for teachers. Teacher's agreed that they had received some level of staff development but in many cases it did not provide sufficient follow-thru. Some regions of the state made great strides in teacher training while others did very little. Local universities did not offer programs or faculty who were knowledgeable of the needs of students with severe disabilities.

In order for pre-service programs to accomplish a shift in focus, training content must be broadened beyond that of producing technically competent teachers and must be offered with regularity and forethought. Teachers must process the skills to design the accommodations and adaptations so critical to the community and school participation of persons with severe disabilities. Successful community presence and participation could be achieved not only through technical instruction, but also through a sensitive understanding of the social context and forces that will allow the participation to be valued.

To be effective, staff development programs must systematically build teacher's abilities to problem solve creatively. It is the imaginative use of all available resources that singles out the adaptive learner/educator who is still able to teach when unexpectedly challenged. No program can provide teachers with the educational solutions for all students, staff and school policy challenges they may encounter. Instead staff development programs must prepare teachers to analyze, brainstorm, negotiate, reflect and continuously revise their solutions in conversation and interaction with their professional and nonprofessional colleagues. Without this critical appreciation of and commitment to creative change, reflection and problem solving, teachers can easily become dependent on instructional programming that teaches isolated skills to segregated students.

Lastly, staff development programs should assist teachers with identifying the unique personal and professional abilities they bring to teaching, fostering a process of self-evaluation and self-managed professional growth. Programs also need to assist teachers in creating contexts for professional sharing through mentoring and networking. Not only do these strategies offer teachers the opportunity to find in others the strengths to compliment their own weaknesses, the experience of professional connectiveness itself may alleviate the isolation and eventual "burn out" long experienced by many special educators.

Conclusions

Benefits / Outcomes. It is clear from this study teachers believe that a community based / functional curriculum is more relevant to students with severe disabilities than traditional curriculum. Teachers believe students are better able to learn self-help skills, more likely to be employed upon graduation from high school, and more likely to have a higher quality of life as a result. There are also indicators that teachers believe students learn better social skills which make them more capable of adjusting and adapting to "general" education classrooms.

State and local supports. The Ohio Department of Education, Division of Special Education, supports the philosophy of community based / functional curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to use the curriculum by their supervisors and is reflected in the development of the IEP's. Approximately one half of the teachers in the study believe they are receiving sufficient resources to fully implement the program while the other half finds other sources of support from the community. Many teachers use their personal fiscal resources to fund community based activities.

Barriers. A significant barrier is the lack of general education teacher's accepting students with severe disabilities. Although most of these students spend the majority of their school day in segregated classrooms, they have not been welcomed or invited to participate in the majority of general school activities. An example of this was noted on a survey where the teacher stated "General education teachers "accept" students with disabilities as long as they are not in the regular classroom setting. Once the student are in the general education classrooms, the acceptance level varies based on the teacher, the principal, the supervisor and the administrations attitude". Additionally, general school personnel does not acknowledge the importance of community based / functional curriculum, provide verbal encouragement, or support the activities. Arranging for additional personnel to assist with activities taking place in the community is a continuous problem for the teachers.

Community / Parents. Individuals in the community have been supportive of the implementation of community based / functional curriculum by assisting with personnel time, materials, money, etc. The business community has been accepting of schools using their facilities as teaching environments for students although they have not been as supportive in providing work opportunities for students.

Parents whose children are enrolled in the program are satisfied with the results and report examples of their child's ability to transfer skills learned in school and the community to the home environment. In about half of the schools, training seminars have been made available to parents on the topic of community based / functional curriculum.

Staff Development. Teachers have been adequately trained in the use of community based / functional curriculum. Supervisors have provided technical assistance and/or have demonstrated effective techniques for implementation. Other staff development opportunities have been made available by the Special Education Regional Resource Centers and conferences attended by the participants.